

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6722

FOLLOWING TEL SENT NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY AND MADRAS MAY 5, 1976,
REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 1102

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: TURMOIL IN CPI AND CPM IN WEST BENGAL

REF: CALCUTTA 0885, CALCUTTA 0938

1. AS WE HAVE REPORTED IN REFTELS, RECENT MONTHS HAVE BEEN A PERIOD OF TURMOIL IN THE CPI AND CPM IN WEST BENGAL. MILITANTS IN BOTH PARTIES HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY OUTSPOKEN OVER THE CONSERVATIVE STANCE OF LEADERSHIP AND HAVE ADVOCATED A MORE ACTIVE LINE OF OPPOSITION, THOUGH UPROAR HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY MARKED IN THE CPM.

2. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE YOUTH AND PEASANT WINGS OF THE WEST BENGAL CPI HAVE IN RECENT WEEKS BEEN SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL POLICY OF COOPERATION WITH CONGRESS. THE TWO WINGS, LED RESPECTIVELY BY GURUDAS DAS GUPTA (YOUTH FRONT) AND BISWANATH MUKHERJEE (PEASANT FRONT) REPRESENT AN ESTIMATED 40 PERCENT OF THE WB CPI MEMBERSHIP. MUKHERJEE AND DAS GUPTA REPORTEDLY FAVOR A MORE CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD CONGRESS, EXCEPT ON FOREIGN POLICY, AND GREATER COOPERATION WITH OTHER LEFT PARTIES, PARTICULARLY THE CPM. THEY

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ERATION WITH OTHER LEFT PARTIES, PARTICULARLY THE CPM. THEY

AND THEIR FOLLOWERS FEEL THAT THE CPI IN WEST BENGAL HAS BEEN LOSING ITS LEFTIST IMAGE BECAUSE OF ITS IDENTIFICATION WITH CONGRESS AND ITS LACK OF TIES WITH THE CPM AND THE SMALLER LEFT PARTIES.

3. NO ONE SERIOUSLY EXPECTS THAT THIS WILL LEAD TO AN OPEN SPLIT IN THE WB CPI. BUT MILITANT PRESSURES DO MAKE LIFE MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PART LEADERSHIP AND MAY OBLIGE IT TO TAKE A MORE RESERVED STANCE VIS A VIS CONGRESS. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN SEVERAL INSTANCES OF CRITICISM OF THE GOWB BY CPI SPOKESMEN DURING THE CURRENT SESSION OF THE WEST BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. SOME OBSERVERS QUESTION WHETHER, IN VIEW OF MILITANT OPPOSITION TO COOPERATION WITH CONGRESS, THE CPI WILL ALLY ITSELF WITH CONGRESS WHEN AND IF ELECTIONS ARE HELD, AND THERE IS EVEN TALK OF A CPI/CPM ELECTED ALLIANCE (THIS HOWEVER SEEMS VERY UNLIKELY).

4. BUT THE CPI'S TROUBLES ARE MILD COMPARED TO THOSE OF THE CPM. THE LATTER IS SO RACKED BY DISPUTE THAT ITS VERY EXISTENCE AS A MAJOR PARTY IN WEST BENGAL MAY BE THREATENED. THE CPM'S PROBLEMS GO BACK TO ITS DEFEAT IN THE 1972 STATE ELECTIONS WHICH LEFT MANY OF ITS CADRES FRUSTRATED AND DEMORALIZED. SINCE 1974 CPM STATE LEADERSHIP HAS EXPELLED SEVERAL RADICAL FACTIONS AND FRUSTRATION AMONG PARTY MILITANTS HAS GROWN CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY, AS THE RESULT OF THE CPM'S INACTIVITY. AGITATION BY MILITANTS HAS BEEN ON THE INCREASE RECENTLY BECAUSE OF SUSPICION THAT SOME CPM LEADERS, NOTABLY JYOTI BASU, MAY BE ATTEMPTING TO STEER THE CPM TOWARD A MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE CPI AND EVEN WITH THE CONGRESS. THESE SUSPICIONS WERE FUELED BY THE MEETING THAT BASU AND FOUR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CPM POLITBURO HELD EARLY IN APRIL WITH MRS. GANDHI (CALCUTTA 0938). (IT DOES APPEAR THAT BASU WOULD LIKE TO MOVE THE CPM CLOSER TO THE CPI AND MIGHT EVEN BE READY TO MAKE GESTURES TO CONGRESS.)

5. THE STATE CPM LEADERSHIP HAS RESORTED INCREASINGLY IN RECENT MONTHS TO EXPULSION AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION TO MAINTAIN ITS POSITION. LATE LAST YEAR ROBIN CHATTERJEE, AN IMPORTANT CPM UNION LEADER FROM THE ASANSOL-DURGAPUR AREA, WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPELLED AND A LARGE NUMBER OF HIS FOLLOWERS APPARENTLY FOLLOWED HIM OUT OF THE PARTY (HE SAYS 10,000). MORE RECENTLY, SADHAN CHAKRAVORTY, A MAJOR CPM FIGURE IN THE 24 PARGANAS DISTRICT, WAS EXPELLED, A DECISION WHICH HAS CAUSED THE 24 PARGANAS CPM DISTRICT COMMITTEE TO RISE IN REVOLT AGAINST THE LEADERSHIP. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN EXPULSIONS OF PROMINENT CPM PEASANT FRONT FIGURES IN THE MIDNAPUR DISTRICT.

6. AS RESULT OF ALL THIS TURMOIL, THE WEST BENGAL CPM HAS EXPERIENCED A DROP IN MEMBERSHIP AND IN COLLECTION OF FUNDS. FUND COLLECTION FOR 1975 IS REPORTED TO HAVE FALLEN TO RS 10,000 IN CONTRAST TO RS 50,000 IN 1972. VARYING FIGURES ARE CITED FOR THE FALL IN MEMBERSHIP. CPI KALANTAR REPORTS THAT MEMBERSHIP IN THE CPM YOUTH FRONT FELL FROM 6,259 IN 1974 TO 2,484 IN 1975 AND THAT THE CPM STUDENT FRONT FELL FROM 10,960 IN 1974 TO 2,239 IN 1975. ACCORDING TO KALANTAR, OVERALL CPM MEMBERSHIP FOR WEST BENGAL FELL FROM 34,000 TO 16,000 BETWEEN 1974 AND THE END OF 1975 AND CIRCULATION OF CPM PAPER GANASHAKTI FELL FROM 40,000 TO 7,000. HINDUSTAN STANDARD PUTS WEST BENGAL CPM MEMBERSHIP AT 22,985 AS OF MARCH 1976, AGAINST 36,000 ABOUT A YEAR EARLIER.

7. OF COURSE KALANTAR, THE OFFICIAL CPI ORGAN, IS HARDLY AN OBJECTIVE SOURCE FOR INFORMATION ON THE CPI, AND NEITHER IS THE HINDUSTAN STANDARD, BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE NO DOUBT THAT THE STATE CPM HAS SUFFERED SERIOUS MEMBERSHIP LOSSES. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THOSE WHO WERE EXPELLED AND DROPPED OUT WILL JOIN UP WITH THE NAXALITES OR OTHER MILITANT GROUPS WHICH ADVOCATE VIOLENCE. IT SEEMS QUITE LIKELY THAT AN IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF THOSE WHO FAILED TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP IN CPM WENT TO THE CPI, AND SOME PERHAPS ALSO TO CONGRESS, BUT WE ARE TOLD THAT MANY HAVE ALSO TURNED TOWARD NAXALISM. FURTHER CONVULSIONS IN THE CPM COULD STRENGTHEN THIS TREND AND RAISE THE DISQUIETING PROSPECT OF A RESURGENCE OF LEFT WING VIOLENCE IN THE STATE. IT IS WORTH EMPHASIZING, THOUGH, THAT LEFT WING VIOLENCE SEEMS VERY FAR OFF AT THIS STAGE AND THAT EVEN IF IT WERE TO COME THE GOWB SHOULD BE ABLE TO COPE WITH IT WITH RELATIVE EASE.

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